

Required PME for Promotion to Captain in the Infantry
EWS Contemporary Issue Paper
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to
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As it has been for the past few thousand years, the battlefield is becoming increasingly dispersed. In the current operating environment, junior officers, lieutenants and captains, are being called upon to make decisions more than they ever have in history. At the same time, the immediacy of global communications is lending an ever-greater strategic impact to many of these decisions. These young officers also have the most opportunity and responsibility for developing enlisted Marines through regular, meaningful contact. Yet these same leaders receive the least amount of education in their formative years. In fact, it is only after four to seven years that they are fully exposed to Marine Corps doctrine, as embodied in the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) series. The Marine Corps should augment its Professional Military Education (PME) program in order to ensure that those officers most responsible for developing Marines, in garrison and in combat, and most often tasked with accomplishing missions on highly dispersed battlefields are well grounded in Marine Corps doctrine. Changes to required officer PME should begin with the infantry community because, as the largest single community, it is most affected by this omission in officer education. Also, infantry officers have the most uniform MOS track in the first several years of

commissioned service, so changes to required PME could be test-driven in that community first.

Background

For illustration, take the hypothetical case of an infantry officer who graduates from the Infantry Officer Course (IOC) in 2000 and is assigned to a battalion. In 2004 he is promoted to captain and assigned to a "B" billet. He has had no required PME to this point, but he has been promoted twice, has probably led two or more platoons and perhaps served as a company executive officer or an assistant battalion staff officer. He is now most likely serving in a billet outside his MOS. Given the opportunity, he can enroll in the Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) non-resident program, or he can hope to be selected for a resident course in 2006 or 2007. However, he is not *required* to complete *any* PME until he is eligible for selection to major in 2008.

Currently, officers can expect to have an average of nine years commissioned service before being promoted to major. In that time, the only required PME is EWS, which usually is not completed until the fifth year, or later, of commissioned service. Almost always it is completed after promotion to captain. Majors spend about five years in grade and are required

to complete Command and Staff before promotion. Lieutenant Colonels (average five years time in grade) must graduate from a war college. Colonels (average four years time in grade) do not have a PME requirement but are required to serve in a joint billet in order to be eligible for promotion.¹

Almost all the officer ranks have associated PME requirements except that of lieutenants. Lieutenants leave The Basic School (TBS) indoctrinated with the notion of "lifelong learner" as one of the roles they are to assume. However, the Marine Corps ignores that aspect of their development for (potentially) the next seven to nine years. Yet these are the officers who have the greatest impact on daily operations, as well as the closest interaction with enlisted Marines. They should not have their own educational development neglected.

The Problem

Until 2001, lieutenants were required to complete the *Warfighting* distance education program from the Marine Corps Institute (MCI) to be considered PME complete and eligible for promotion to captain. According to the Marine Corps University website, that requirement was discontinued for two reasons. First, the *Warfighting* curriculum was incorporated into TBS program of instruction and was no longer necessary. Secondly,

lieutenants do not need a PME requirement because in the years between MOS training and promotion to captain they are "expected to focus on developing into proficient practitioners within their occupational fields."²

This reasoning seems to make sense, but closer examination reveals faults in its logic. *Warfighting* has been only partially incorporated into TBS, where students are required to read portions of MCDP-1 and participate in a 90-minute group discussion.³ For infantry officers, this is supplemented by a one-hour discussion of selected topics from MCDP-1 during the first week of IOC.⁴ The remainder of the MCDP publications are not included in any formal officer instruction until EWS. Results from the first weeks of resident EWS indicate that many officers do not have a real understanding of even MCDP-1.⁵ The Marine Corps claims that the MCDP series is the core of its doctrine, yet in the four to seven years between graduating IOC and enrolling in EWS, most officers have had no instruction in the MCDP series and no formal reinforcement of the portions to which they were exposed during entry-level training.

The average infantry officer will have only one year of service in the Operating Forces following IOC before promotion to first lieutenant, and it is not practical to extend the length of entry level training or IOC. Also, second lieutenants are busy getting their feet on the ground in their first year,

trying to translate theoretical knowledge into practical leadership. It makes sense that there is no additional PME requirement for second lieutenants. However, first lieutenants are a different case. In two years' service as a first lieutenant, an infantry officer can expect to deploy at least once (probably his second deployment with the battalion), and be assigned to lead at least one more platoon. Additionally, he will likely serve as a company executive officer, assistant battalion operations officer, or even a company commander. Following his time with the battalion, a newly promoted captain could serve as a commander in security forces, a member of a joint staff, an instructor at entry-level training, or in a number of other important billets, still without an education in Marine Corps doctrine.

This is not to insinuate that commanders are neglecting their obligation to develop subordinates. Experience indicates that commanders take their charge to develop subordinates very seriously and put great effort into this. However, the evidence indicates that a lot of the effort is based on an incorrect assumption that those subordinates are better-grounded in doctrinal knowledge than they truly are. This is what needs correction.

The Solution

The new PME requirement should be neither a wholesale adoption of the non-resident EWS Phase I curriculum nor a resurrection of the *Warfighting* MCI requirement. *Warfighting* could serve as a portion, but the focus should be on the following: MCDP-1, Warfighting; MCDP 1-3, Tactics; MCDP-2, Intelligence; MCDP-4, Logistics; and MCDP-6, Command and Control. While including the entire MCDP series would be ideal, the portions of Marine Corps doctrine listed above are most applicable to lieutenants and captains. Also, in limiting the new PME requirement, the Marine Corps would ensure that it is reasonable regardless of operational tempo.

Similar to the non-resident EWS curriculum, evaluation would come in the form of guided discussions and written tests, which could be proctored by the seminar leader or by a designated officer in the battalion. The format for both teaching and evaluating would be flexible to accommodate training and deployment schedules.

The entire requirement could be accomplished in less than twenty-five hours, of which eighteen to twenty would be hours spent reading and studying, done individually. One or two hours of discussion for each block of reading would complete the requirement. Spread out over a year, this amounts to a little

more than two hours of extra work every month. This schedule should not be too great an imposition on time for most units. However, for those few units that are too heavily tasked, there should be an allowance for the battalion commander to extend allowed time for completion to eighteen months if he determines his officers have not had a fair amount of time to complete the requirement.

Enrollment would be automatic upon promotion to first lieutenant. Selection for captain would be contingent upon completion. In this way, each officer would have every needed opportunity to complete the program.

Changes made to PME requirements for infantry officers could be adapted for officers in other communities in ways that are suitable for each community. For example, the proposed timeline may not fit very well into the training pipeline for other communities, particularly aviators. It would need to be modified to ensure that all officers are given the minimum required exposure to doctrinal publications.

Counterarguments

Required PME for first lieutenants would not take away from commanders' ability to train lieutenants in their charge, nor would it detract from unit PME programs already in place.

Instead, this program would give commanders another tool for developing and evaluating junior officers. It would create a minimum standard, to be built upon by whatever individual or unit PME programs are already in place.

The greatest concern with implementing a new PME requirement is the potential for adding to the already hectic operational tempo in each battalion. Even if battalions were not cycling through deployments as rapidly as they currently are, it is not reasonable to expect that lieutenants would have the opportunity to attend a resident course, even if a separate course was established at each infantry base.

It is reasonable, however, to expect that in the year after promotion to first lieutenant an officer could complete a non-resident course similar to the *Warfighting* program from MCI, with seminar-style discussions conducted inside the battalion or regiment. Those who disagree should balance the investment in time against the return of junior officers who have a genuine understanding of Marine Corps doctrine.

There may be concerns that the imposition of a new PME requirement that, initially, is required of infantry officers only would be unfair to them. However, there are already community-specific requirements throughout the officer corps. Aviators, for example, must pass annual NATOPS and Instrument Flight proficiency tests and check flights.

Conclusion

All well-led organizations establish company policy and ensure that their personnel, especially those in leadership or decision-making positions, are inculcated with these policies. Good leaders know that it is virtually impossible to establish rules or procedures to cover every eventuality, but that a subordinate who is well-versed in company policy is much more likely to make correct decisions and behave as desired than one who is not. For the Marine Corps, company policy is found in the MCDP series. The very notion of *Strategic Corporal* is recognition that, on today's dispersed battlefields, crucially important decisions are often made by junior Marines—not just NCOs, but junior officers, as well. Shouldn't these Marines be well-versed in company policy?

While the format for this additional PME requirement is debatable, the need for it is not. The Marine Corps should make every reasonable effort to ensure that young officers, those who are closest to enlisted Marines and who are most responsible for their training, are themselves expert in the company policy of the Marine Corps. With the imminent increase in end-strength, the need to resolve this deficiency is now greater than ever. Corrective action now will pay a dividend in the future—a

dividend of increased effectiveness of both young officers and enlisted Marines.

Word Count: 1885

¹ Marine Corps University, <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/pme/Officer/officerpme.htm>.

² Ibid.

³ The Basic School Program of Instruction, 2007.

⁴ Infantry Officer Course Program of Instruction, 2007.

⁵ EWS Faculty, interview by the author, October 23, 2007.